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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 000891

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL SOCI PHUM KCOR MARR PINR UZ

SUBJECT: DAS KROL'S MEETING WITH UZBEK NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL SECRETARY ATAEV

REF: A. TASHKENT 860  
B. TASHKENT 879

Classified By: Political Officer Tim Buckley for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary: On July 25 visiting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia George Krol met with National Security Council (NSC) Secretary Murod Ataev in Tashkent. Ataev spoke at length about the recent munitions depot explosion in Kagan, thanking the U.S. government for preparing a military assistance package while politely declining offers of humanitarian aid. He also discussed Uzbek concerns about Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan.

He emphasized that intelligence cooperation was very productive in the pre-Andijon days and he called for renewed cooperation now that the "dark days" of Andijon are in the past. Ataev also raised concerns about potential sanctions due to Uzbekistan's anti-money laundering regime, stating that the Uzbek side is open to meeting with U.S. and other officials to assuage concerns. DAS Krol conveyed that the U.S. wants to take pragmatic steps to engage across the board, but that Uzbekistan needs to move beyond words to concrete actions to help overcome its image problem in Washington. The tone and substance of Ataev's comments indicates that Uzbekistan is receptive to moving forward on security cooperation with the U.S., and our challenge will be to encourage progress in all spheres of our relationship.  
End summary.

Kagan Disaster

¶2. (C) The explosions at the munitions depot in Kagan (Bukhara Province) were the first issue raised by Ataev. He characterized this as an emergency situation and "a strong blow," though he clarified that it was purely accidental and not a terrorist act. In particular, he said an electrical fire was the root cause of the blaze, which then spread with strong winds that were reportedly blowing in the early morning hours of July 10. He conceded that there were some

roofs and windows damaged as a result of the blasts, but insisted that property damage was not widespread. Ataev added that everything is back to normal in Bukhara City. He thanked DAS Krol for the U.S. Government's willingness to organize a military assistance package, but he politely declined offers of humanitarian assistance, and he stated that resources and facilities in Bukhara have been mobilized to assist displaced or injured victims. (Note: Ataev's accounts of the situation in Kagan, including damage reports, were consistent with what our Defense Attache reported after his visit to the site on July 18. End note.)

¶13. (C) Ataev noted that Russian officials have told him that the Kagan facility was the largest depot of its kind still remaining anywhere in the former Soviet Union, including in Russia. Ataev said the Government of Uzbekistan had managed to eliminate 190 tons of ordnance in the past three years, but "we were physically unable to liquidate it all."

#### Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

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¶14. (C) DAS Krol asked for Ataev's thoughts on the possibility of another severe winter in neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and, like the Foreign Minister in a separate July 25 meeting (septel), Ataev cited corruption as the major reason for acute problems next door. "They do not think about the future," he commented, and noted "there are well-developed family clans" in the corrupt government structure. "And they say they want investment...in what? Why would anyone invest there?" he asked rhetorically.

¶15. (C) Again mirroring Foreign Minister Norov, he said "we end up being villains for closing our border, but it cannot be otherwise" due to the flow of narcotics. He noted that 725 kilograms was seized just in the past month at road and rail links on the Tajik border. He added vindictively that terrorists have entered Uzbek territory in the past with the help of complicit Tajik officers. He mentioned that Tajikistan also does not inform the Uzbeks when they do military maneuvers, forcing Uzbeks to scramble troops; this contributes to heightened tensions. Ataev said Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT) is active in the region, and Uzbekistan remains concerned about terrorist elements crossing from the neighboring republics. He defended Uzbekistan's tough stance on border issues, noting that "problems like Nagorno-Karabakh never happened here."

#### Afghanistan

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¶16. (C) Ataev noted "the tough situation" in Afghanistan, but he said Uzbekistan will continue to work with Afghanistan "even though there are many former Taliban and communist elements in the government." He recognized Uzbekistan can play a role in "developing a corridor" which can help promote Afghanistan's stability and lead to mutually beneficial trade links. Ataev cited Karimov's July 22 meeting with the Ambassador, saying "we're ready" to cooperate, and he pointed

to the Termez Air Bridge as a tangible example of Uzbekistan's support for our goals in Afghanistan. Yet, he cautioned that "we do not want a repeat of the mistakes of the USSR." Ataev said Uzbekistan is not ready to help train any Afghans, as the last time they did so the soldiers ended up fighting for the mudjaheddin.

#### Intelligence Cooperation

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¶17. (C) Ataev noted that previous cooperation with the CIA in the pre-Andijon days was very productive, and that "exchange of operational intelligence was very useful during a very tough period when the Taliban were near our border." He also mentioned that equipment such as drones were used very effectively to guarantee Uzbekistan's security, which he appreciated. He described Andijon as a "tragedy" and "a dark

event" that hurt cooperation, but added that it is now part of Uzbekistan's history and that it is important not to repeat it. He suggested that renewed cooperation was welcome because "there are people on our territory who want instability," including HT.

Money Laundering

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¶8. (C) At the end of the meeting, Ataev raised the issue of international pressure on Uzbekistan regarding its anti-money laundering regime. He expressed surprise by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) advisory and said Uzbekistan is prepared to invite experts to discuss the issue and do whatever it takes to avoid sanctions. Significantly, he acknowledged that changes to the law seemed to hurt, and then he reiterated the standard excuse that people in Uzbekistan do not trust banks and suspending the law until 2013 will allow time to build confidence and fine-tune the monitoring systems so scrutiny does not slow down the economy.

(Comment: It is a good sign that the issue was raised at this level by the Uzbeks, which demonstrates that it is firmly on their radar screen. End comment.)

DAS Krol on Engagement

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¶9. (C) As was the case during a separate meeting with Foreign Minister Norov (ref B), DAS Krol conveyed the message to Ataev that the U.S. wants to engage Uzbek society and government across the board -- security, economic, governance, and human rights issues -- but that we need to move past words to concrete actions. DAS Krol noted this was especially true given Uzbekistan's image problem in Washington stemming from the Andijon incidents; nonetheless, he emphasized that although we do not see eye-to-eye on all issues we do have many common interests to pursue.

Comment:

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¶10. (C) This meeting, three days after President Karimov's well-publicized July 22 meeting with the Ambassador, was an opportunity for Ataev to press home the message that Uzbekistan is open to rebuilding cooperation with the United States in many spheres. Yet, there are still elements within the Government of Uzbekistan that want to restrict such cooperation, as evidenced by the reluctance of some circles of the GOU to allow the Drug Enforcement Administration to resume activities. Providing military assistance in the aftermath of the Kagan disaster offers us a chance to take a major step in building bridges, and if we play our cards right it could help open up more cooperative endeavors that meet our national security interests. However, the Government of Uzbekistan will remain adamant that there are no problems with corruption or weak anti-money laundering policies here, so we will need to push for progress in all spheres of our relationship.

¶11. (U) This telegram has been cleared by DAS Krol.

BUTCHER